

Religion and Cultural Studies Senior Research Seminar

The College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida



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REL 4910: Religion and Cultural Studies Senior Research Seminar

Spring, 2018

Course Description:

Welcome to the Religion and Cultural Studies Senior Seminar. This course will provide a theoretical space to engage critical terms, concepts, and topics in the areas of religion and cultural studies. Rather than limiting the content of the course to texts dealing with a singular topic (and thereby determining the direction of the course for everyone), this course will provide students with key terminology and concepts from contemporary studies across a number of disciplines. Consequently, students will be expected to utilize the various terms and concepts as they relate to their respective interests in these two related fields of study. This process will culminate with the production of a scholarly research paper in an area of interest for each student in consultation with the instructor. Underlying this discourse will be an ongoing self-reflexive questioning: How does one theorize religion? What role does cultural studies play in this theorizing? What is theory and why is it needed? These questions will set the stage for a number of other questions: How does culture communicate, transmit, or transform meaning and, conversely, how does meaning communicate, transmit, or transform culture? In the process, the student will be invited to think critically about religion and cultural studies by means of various representative theoretical perspectives.

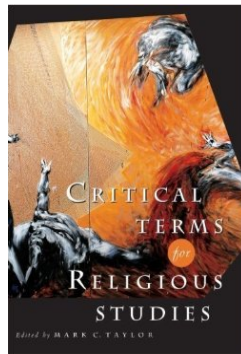
Since this is a senior *seminar*, rather than a lecture-based or test-driven course, this course will require students to take an active role in discussions and essays throughout the semester. In other words, generating ongoing conversation by way of critical questioning will be key to a successful engagement with the topics at hand. Moreover, the texts for the course provide only a starting point for the research and reading required. They will function as a guide in order to help focus each student's individual interests more sharply and to provide the theoretical tools for a higher level critical engagement with the material. Although each student comes to the senior seminar with different educational experiences and interests, the goal is to provide students with the necessary scholarly tools for their own research purposes.

Course Objectives:

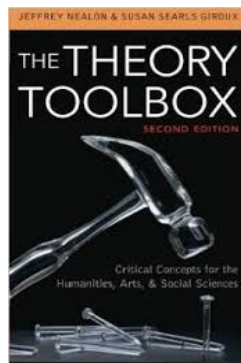
- The student will be able to critically examine and articulate various contemporary terms and concepts.
- The student will be responsible for leading and contributing to class discussions on selected terms and concepts.
- The student will produce a scholarly research paper on a selected topic.

Required Texts:

Critical Terms for Religious Studies, Mark C. Taylor. Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998)



The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, 2nd edition Jeffrey Nealon and Susan Searls Giroux (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012)



Overview of Course Assignments

I. Introductory Posts and Orientation Quiz [total possible points = 10]: There will be 2 introductory assignments and an orientation quiz during the introductory module. The student-self introductions, which will be used for evidence of participation (viz., the university-required financial aid disbursement assignment), will be due by the end of the first week of classes; however, I will accept late submissions for this assignment. You will not be able to proceed to

module 1 without reading through all of the information in the introductory module and submitting *both* the *student info for instructor* assignment and *the quiz*. Introductory posts will be graded as complete/incomplete.

II. Written Assignments/Posts [total possible points = 340]: Participation in the course will be determined by student-generated discussion questions, student responses, and instructor-generated reflection question posts. Directions and due dates for written assignments will be provided under the "Assignments" heading in the modules. Students must be aware of all deadlines. Do not wait until the last day (or closing minutes) to respond. Writing assignment prompts will **not** be reopened once closed. Writing assignments will open during the first week of each module; make sure you are aware of all deadlines, since some writing assignments will close prior to the close of the module (e.g., student-generated discussion questions). In some cases you will not be able to view questions or responses until you post your own. Do **not** attempt to post something in order to view questions or responses without being ready to post, since you will **not** be able to delete or edit your post once submitted.

III. Abstract [total possible points = 20]: Prior to the final module, students will be required to submit an abstract indicating the intended topic and thesis of the final research paper (after consultation with the instructor regarding potential topics).

IV. Final Research Paper [total possible points = 120]: Students will be required to submit a final research paper on a topic relevant to their area(s) of interest.

V. Exit Interview [total possible points = 10]: Students will be required to turn in an exit interview regarding their experiences in the Religion and Cultural Studies program for assessment purposes (i.e., assessment of the program).

Note: In lieu of an end-of-semester extra credit assignment, I will allow late submissions (or missed student responses) to student-generated questions or a response to an instructor-generated reflection question to be submitted no later than the subsequent module with a 5 point reduction from total points earned for the assignment. It is up to the student to request this option.

Students who turn in all written assignments/posts on time through and including module 6 will have 10 extra points added to their final point total.

Regarding the Comments Box in Grading Rubrics:

Any questions about written assignments should be addressed through course mail. Since the comments box in assignment and assessment rubrics (as it is currently structured in Canvas) does not immediately alert the instructor on her/his dashboard (thereby creating an unnecessary lag in communication), and because it is important to keep all student-instructor correspondence archived in one "place," all questions related to writing assignments and course material should be sent to the instructor through course mail. Also, make sure you read the the introductory remarks in each of the modules, since you will **not** be able to advance to subsequent modules without viewing the remarks.

Final grades will be based on the **number of points earned** by the student out of a total of 500 possible points. Canvas has a habit of breaking down different types of assignments in terms of percentages. One of the problems with this feature is that it doesn't count missed assignments in its calculation (which yields a false percentage). This feature cannot be turned off; do not let those percentages confuse you. See Grade Scale for points/letter grid.

Grade Scale

Final grades will be based on the number of points earned by the student out of a total of 500 possible points.

A = 448-500 pts.

B+ = 423-447 pts.

B = 398-422 pts.

C+ = 373-397 pts.

A = 448-500 pts.

C = 348-372 pts.

D+ = 323-347 pts.

D = 298-322 pts.

F = 297 pts. and below

C = 348-372 pts.

Conduct, Copyright, and Accommodations

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and cheating of any kind on an examination, quiz, or assignment will result at least in an "F" for that assignment and, depending on the severity of the case, may lead to an "F" for the entire course and be subject to appropriate referral to the Office of Student Conduct for further action. See the [UCF Golden Rule](#) for further information. I will assume for this course that you will adhere to the academic creed of this University and will maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. In other words, don't cheat by giving answers to others or taking them from anyone else. I will also adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity, so please do not ask me to change (or expect me to change) your grade illegitimately or to bend or break rules for one person that will not apply to everyone.

Personal Conduct

You are expected to conduct yourself in a manner that is conducive to the academic ends that we are attempting to achieve (see University standards for personal conduct as outlined in The Golden Rule). This course is an educational safe zone. It welcomes the viewpoints of students of all sexual orientations, gender identities, races, ethnicities, religions, philosophies, and abilities. Consequently, all members of this learning community are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity and to refrain from offensive posts. It is expected that each student will be sensitive to the beliefs/values of others in the course. **Critical thinking should not be understood as "belief bashing."** In the case that this advice is not followed you should expect a lowering of your final grade or, in the event of continuous serious violations, removal from the course.

Copyright

This course may contain copyright protected materials such as audio or video clips, images, text materials, etc. These items are being used with regard to the Fair Use doctrine in order to enhance the learning environment. Please do not copy, duplicate, download or distribute these items. The use of these materials is strictly reserved for this online classroom environment and your use only. All copyright materials are credited to the copyright holder.

Third-Party Software and FERPA

During this course you might have the opportunity to use public online services and/or software applications sometimes called third-party software such as a blog or wiki. While some of these could be required assignments, you need **not** make any personally identifying information on a public site. Do not post or provide any private information about yourself or your classmates. Where appropriate you may use a pseudonym or nickname. Some written assignments posted publicly may require personal reflection/comments, but the assignments will not require you to disclose any personally identity-sensitive information. If you have any concerns about this, please contact your instructor.

Disability Statement

The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. This syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must contact the professor at the beginning of the semester to discuss needed accommodations. No accommodations will be provided until the student has contacted the professor to request accommodations. Students who need accommodations must be registered with Student Disability Services, Student Resource Center Room 132, phone (407) 823-2371, TTY/TDD only phone (407) 823-2116, before requesting accommodations from the professor.

Online Protocols

Classroom Expectations

The following ground rules will help your work in this course to go more smoothly. Please carefully review these expectations and follow them.

1. Academic integrity will be appraised according to the student academic behavior standards outlined in *The Golden Rule of the University of Central Florida's Student Handbook*. See <http://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/> for further details.
2. Keep up with the reading. You have quite a few chapters, modules, discussion postings, and e-mail messages to read for the class. Please keep up with the reading. Students who keep up with the reading tend to do much better in this kind of class than those who do not.

Messaging

Make sure you:

1. Check your inbox at least twice per week (more often is better).
2. Be patient. Don't expect an immediate response when you send a message. Generally, two days is considered reasonable amount of time to receive a reply.
3. Be courteous and considerate. Being honest and expressing yourself freely is very important but being considerate of others online is just as important as in the classroom.
4. Make every effort to be clear. Online communication lacks the nonverbal cues that fill in much of the meaning in face-to-face communication.
5. Do not use all caps. This makes the message very hard to read and is considered "shouting." Check spelling, grammar, and punctuation (you may want to compose in a word processor, then cut and paste the message into the discussion).
6. Break up large blocks of text into paragraphs and use a space between paragraphs.
7. Never assume that your messages can be read by no one except yourself; others may be able to read or access your mail. Never send or keep anything that you would not mind seeing on the evening news.

Discussion Topics

General "rules of the road" or protocols that apply to messages also apply to the use of discussions. Use the following conventions when composing a discussion posting:

1. During a Discussion assignment, deadlines for posting to and replying will be specified with each assignment. It is a good practice to always check the Discussions multiple times during the week.
2. Be patient. Don't expect an immediate response when you send a message.
3. Everyone should feel free to participate in class and online discussions. Regular and meaningful discussion postings constitute a substantial portion of your grade.
4. Respect each other's ideas, feelings and experiences.
5. Be courteous and considerate. It is important to be honest and to express yourself freely, but being considerate of others is just as important and expected online as it is in the classroom.
6. Explore disagreements and support assertions with data and evidence.
7. Do not use postings such as "I agree," "I don't know either," "Who cares," or "ditto." They do not add to the discussion, take up space on the Discussions, and will not be counted for assignment credit.
8. Avoid posting large blocks of text. If you must, break them into paragraphs and use a space between paragraphs.

Word of Caution

Since this course is predominantly self-paced, my **very strong recommendation** is that you keep up with the readings, discussion posts, and quizzes in order to stay on track. It has been my experience that self-paced courses are a double-edged sword. The flexibility that makes online courses popular also brings with it the temptation to procrastinate in the absence of weekly F2F meetings. As a result, withdrawals and "F's" due to the inability to complete work are very high

in online courses (especially due to missed quizzes and written assignments). Given this flexibility as well as the open-book nature of this course, make sure you complete the quizzes and written assignments on time. It is best not to wait until the last hour, minute, or seconds prior to the deadline.

No "Incomplete" will be granted without a documented medical emergency. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of all deadlines (keep an eye on the module schedule and follow prompts in the modules and announcements regarding deadlines).

If you find that you have forgotten, misread, misunderstood, misconstrued the deadlines, and/or have “misplaced” your cyber-calendar, are the victim of a computer crash, have fallen prey to cyber-gremlins, and/or your cyber-dog ate your cyber-paper, and/or just plain procrastinated, **do not e-mail the instructor requesting any of the aforementioned.**

The moral of the story is this: if you want to avoid undue stress, anxiety, and do well in the course, make sure you take the time to read on a consistent basis and check in on the discussion messages regularly. Keep in mind that students who are actively engaged in the course will fare better at the end of the semester. If you have any questions concerning the course, feel free to email me. If you encounter material in the readings that you do not understand, contact me and I will gladly assist you.

Federal Financial Aid Regulation

All faculty are required to document students’ academic activity at the beginning of each course. In order to document that you began this course, please complete the **Student Self-Introductions** assignment included in this module by the scheduled date/time (or, if adding the course late, as soon as possible after adding the course). This assignment should be turned in no later than the end of the end of the introductory module. Failure to do so may result in a delay in the disbursement of your financial aid.

Support Services

The following services/resources are available to assist students:

- Review the [Academic Engagement for Financial Aid FAQ](#) web page for a list of frequently asked questions.
- Online@UCF Support – Provides technical assistance to students who use Webcourses@UCF.
 - Live support 8:30 to 4:30
 - 407-823-0407
 - Live Chat and online document search: <http://online.ucf.edu/support/>
 - Email: onlinesupport@ucf.edu
 - Support form: <http://online.ucf.edu/support/contact-online-support/>
 - Weekend and evening hours: Messages are answered by email.
- Service Desk – Students should contact the Service Desk for issues regarding NID passwords or access to university systems.
 - Hours: 8:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday-Friday

- Call: 407-823-5117
- Website: <http://www.cst.ucf.edu/service-desk/>